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ABSTRACT

Described in this process evaluation are the first-year efforts to provide a specialized staff within the Bexar County District Attorney's Office, San Antonio, Texas, to perform advocacy functions for abused and neglected children involved in cases going through the criminal justice system. The report discusses how well the staff met the three objectives of the project: (1) to provide supportive services to alleged victims of child abuse and their families; (2) to develop a system of communication among the Texas Department of Human Services, law enforcement agencies, and the district attorney's office; and (3) to develop a system for tracking civil and criminal cases throughout the judicial process. It is concluded that, after several months of operation, the Advocacy Services Project began to operate in the manner originally intended. The project received funding to continue operation for an additional year. Appendices provide tracking and advocate response forms and a flow chart showing referral procedures. (RH)

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Innovations in Protective Services

P.L. 93-247 Grant Award #06C23-10

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ANNUAL REPORT

Advocacy Services Project

September 30, 1986

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The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Office of Human Development Services of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

ADVOCACY SERVICES PROJECT
Annual Report

September 1, 1985, through August 31, 1986

September 30, 1986

Written by
Lucretia Dennis-Small, M.P.A.

Submitted by
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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the past year, the Texas Department of Human Services (DHS) conducted eight projects that present creative ideas to develop, strengthen, and carry out programs for prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect. (Project titles and locations are shown in figure 1.)

PROJECT GOALS

The goals of the eight projects, funded by Part I of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Public Law 93-247, as amended), are as follows:

- o developing innovative child abuse and neglect programs using volunteer and private agencies;
- o developing innovative child abuse and neglect programs for adolescents;
- o strengthening the quality of child abuse and neglect services through competency-based and specialized training programs and through automated performance tracking;
- o developing an Interagency Child Abuse Network (ICAN) in conjunction with the criminal justice system; and
- o developing models and program designs for planning and delivering child abuse and neglect services and for allocating resources.

PROJECT NAME AND TYPE OF REPORT

This report is one in a series of eight separately packaged reports on the following demonstration projects, five of which are ending this year (final reports) and three of which will continue for another year (annual reports):

- o Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (final report);
- o Advanced Job Skills Training (annual report);

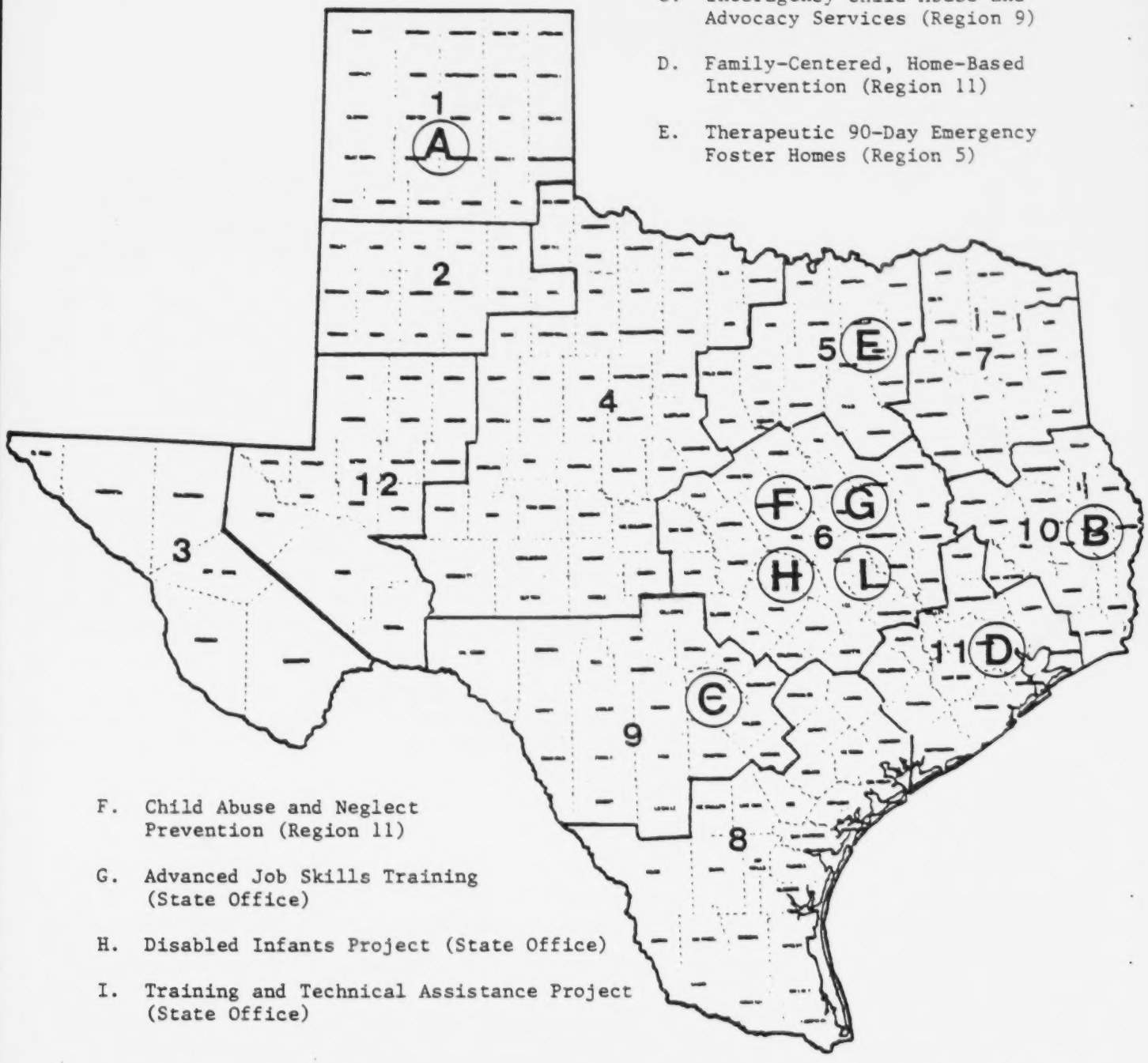


Figure 1. Location of projects by DHS region (or state office--located in DHS Region 6)

- Family-Centered, Home-Based Intervention for Protective Services Clients (final report);
- Automated Performance Tracking and Productivity Improvement (final report);
- Life Skills for Adolescents (final report);
- Therapeutic 90-Day Emergency Foster Homes (final report);
- Interagency Child Abuse Network (annual report); and
- Advocacy Services (annual report).

SELECTION AND ADMINISTRATION

Priorities from DHS's long-range plan provided the basis for selection of the eight projects to be demonstrated, and project results will be used in planning improvements in systems for delivering child protective services (CPS).

Six projects were managed by various DHS regions, and two were run by the Protective Services for Families and Children (PSFC) Branch at DHS headquarters in Austin

Three of the projects--Interagency Child Abuse Network, Advocacy Services, and Family-Centered, Home-Based Intervention--were cooperative ventures between DHS and community-based organizations (for the first two projects, with the Alamo Area Council of Governments and the Bexar County District Attorney's Office of San Antonio; for the third project, with DePelchin Children's Center of Houston).

The Automated Performance Tracking and Productivity Improvement Project was conducted in DHS's Region 10, the Life Skills for Adolescents Project in Region 1, and the Therapeutic 90-Day Emergency Foster Homes Project in Region 5.

The projects entitled Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention and Advanced Job Skills Training operated out of the PSFC Branch at DHS headquarters in Austin.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Each of the eight annual or final reports may be obtained by contacting—

Texas Department of Human Services
Office of Strategic Management, Research, and Development
P.O. Box 2960--Mail Code 234-E
Austin, Texas 78769
Telephone Number (512) 450-3646

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Texas Department of Human Services wishes to acknowledge the contributions of a number of people who participated in the development and implementation of the Advocacy Services Project.

Joyce Dorrycott, director of Special Programs from the Office of Bexar County District Attorney, served as project director. Joy Hollingsworth, supervisor advocate of the Family Violence Unit, and Sandy Jackson, project advocate, managed day-to-day operations. David Rielly, regional director for Services to Families and Children, and Donna Garrett provided regional administrative support to the project. Mary Jane McCarty and Joe Papick from the Protective Services for Families and Children Branch were designated liaisons to the project.

From the Office of Strategic Management, Research, and Development (SMRD)--headed by Murray A. Newman, Ph.D.--efforts were contributed by several members of SMRD's Special Projects Division, which is administered by Alicia Dimmick Essary. Joe Flores, project designer, prepared the grant proposal. Lucretia Dennis-Small, project specialist, provided support to project staff, prepared reports to the funding source, prepared the process evaluation, and arranged for nationwide dissemination of the annual report. Nicholas Constant, Phyllis Jamar, and Peggy Borgfeld of the Technical Communication Section contributed to the good quality of project documents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Advocacy Services Project annual report is a process evaluation of progress made toward achievement of the established goal and objectives of a two-year project. The report describes the first-year efforts of the project staff to develop advocacy services for abused and neglected children in Bexar County (San Antonio, Texas) in the Office of the District Attorney.

The project was proposed by a task force in San Antonio, Texas. This task force (1) recommended the establishment of a network among agencies that deal with child abuse and (2) suggested the provision of specialized staff within the district attorney's office to perform advocacy functions for victims and families in cases processed through the criminal justice system. The Advocacy Services Project addresses the task force's second recommendation.

This report discusses how well the staff met the three project objectives. During the first project year, a project advocate was hired and installed in the district attorney's office. She provided supportive and advocate services to victims of child abuse and to the victims' families. These services included activities such as telephone contact and familarizing the child abuse victims with courtroom procedures.

The project also established a system to track cases through the criminal justice system. The project advocate spent a lot of her time tracking and updating cases as they worked their way through the system.

After several months of operation, the Advocacy Services Project is beginning to operate in the manner it was originally intended. The project has received continuation funding from the Texas Department of Human Services for another year.

BACKGROUND AND ORIGIN

On June 26, 1984, the district attorney of Bexar County (San Antonio, Texas) created a task force on child abuse and charged it with producing a comprehensive plan for the effective prosecution of child abuse cases. The task force was also to recommend procedures and policies that would promote a team approach among networking agencies for handling these cases.

Task Force Report

The task force published its report in January 1985; two of its major recommendations ran as follows:

1. **Establish a network** among agencies that deal with child abuse. The task force reported that coordination among agencies that deal with child abuse victims is crucial to successful investigation and treatment of child abuse and that agreement on basic goals is essential among major agencies that deal with child victims. Task force members agreed that good working relations among all involved agencies would decrease the time it takes to begin treatment and dispose of the charges.

2. **Provide specialized staff** within the district attorney's office. This staff would perform advocacy functions for victims and families in cases processed through the criminal justice system. The task force concluded that child abuse victims and their families need an advocate within the district attorney's office who is sensitive to their needs and who can provide needed assistance, including protection from the perpetrator.

Inception of the Project

To assist in implementing the two task force recommendations in Bexar County, Region 9 of the Texas Department of

Human Services (DHS) proposed the Interagency Child Abuse Network and Advocacy Services Projects.

The present report describes activities of the Advocacy Services Project. The project funds a contracted advocate through the Victim Witness Section of the district attorney's Family Violence Unit.

PROJECT OPERATIONS

Goal

The goal of the Advocacy Services Project is to establish and deliver special services to alleged victims of child abuse and their families. These services, made available through a referral to the project advocate in the district attorney's office, help project clients throughout the criminal justice process.

Objectives

The three objectives established for the project are--

1. to provide supportive services to alleged victims of child abuse and their families referred to the project by the district attorney's office;

2. to develop a system of communication among DHS, law enforcement agencies, and the district attorney's office; and

3. to develop a system for tracking civil and criminal cases throughout the judicial process.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Supportive Services

In September 1985, the project advocate was hired by the district attorney's office. She was housed in the district

attorney's office and spent the month of September getting acquainted with the office and its operations.

The project advocate reviewed copies of the Texas Penal Code, the Texas Family Code, and the task force's recommendations. After reviewing these documents, she discussed them with her immediate supervisor. The advocate was assigned the responsibility of outlining task force recommendations and suggesting ways to implement them in the newly formed Family Violence Unit.

Advocate Activities

The project advocate provided the following specific services to child abuse victims and their families:

- o telephone counseling with the child and family to give reassurance and support (e.g., assessing personal safety and safety of children, parental training, and crisis intervention);

- o office interviews;

- o trips to the courtroom to familiarize the victim with courtroom language and the physical courtroom--the judge's bench, jury box, witness stand (the child was allowed to sit on the stand), counselors' tables; and

- o crisis counseling (sometimes victims acted out at school or refused to talk to parents). (The advocate also counsels parents on procedures for obtaining protective orders if she and the adult family member think the family might be in danger from a perpretrator.)

System to Track Referrals

The project advocate and the DHS intake unit devised a system to track referrals that DHS sent to the district attorney's office. The two offices used a tracking form to transfer information about potential users of advocacy

services. DHS forwarded a tracking form to the advocate in the district attorney's office; the requested services were performed and recorded, and the advocate then returned the filled-out tracking form (see Appendix A) to DHS's intake unit.

Although a system had been set up to communicate the status of cases referred to the project advocate from the district attorney's office, keeping track of each case as it passed through each phase of the criminal justice system remained a problem. Because of lag-time in communication, the project advocate did not always know the current status of a case.

Family Violence Unit

Later in the project, the district attorney's office created a Family Violence Unit. The unit was made up of six advocates (three for child abuse and three for spouse abuse--one of whom handled elderly abuse); three investigators; six attorneys including the chief of the Family Violence Unit; one supervisor of advocates; four support staff; the DHS legal unit; a training director; two paralegals; and a misdemeanor attorney.

Screening Calls

The three child abuse advocates compiled a list of specific questions to be used to assess the nature of telephone calls they received. This screening system helped the advocates more readily receive cases appropriate for their individual areas of specialization.

System of Communication

Early in the project, the project advocate observed DHS casework procedures for 2 1/2 days. She followed crisis calls from the time they were received to their resolution. She also attended staff meetings and viewed videotapes of interviews with victims of child sexual abuse.

The project advocate scheduled and made presentations introducing the project to several service agencies in Bexar County: a psychiatric hospital for children, an emergency shelter for adolescent girls, a felony division in the district attorney's office, the San Antonio Police Department, and to a meeting of the Interagency Child Abuse Network (ICAN). These experiences were helpful to the advocate as she began learning about the many different agencies involved in cases of child abuse/neglect. Also the advocate spent some time in a juvenile court viewing docket call and child conservatorship cases.

As the project progressed, the district attorney's office, law enforcement personnel, DHS, the project director, the advocate, and the advocate supervisor developed and implemented communication systems. A flowchart depicting the route of a referral to the project unit can be found in Appendix B.

Case Tracking

The project advocate estimated that she spent 25 percent of her time tracking cases that had not reached the criminal justice system.

Automated Tracking System

The district attorney and DHS staff developed a tracking form to be used to initiate referrals to advocates. Once an advocate received a referral through the tracking form, it was entered into the daily log. The advocate then accessed the criminal justice computer located in the district attorney's office to find out whether criminal charges had been filed on the alleged perpretrator, whether she or he had been arrested, whether an arraignment or trial date had been set, and whether the suspect was in jail or out on bond awaiting trial.

When the police department sent information about a completed investigation to the district attorney's office and the attorney accepted the case for prosecution, the case was

assigned to an investigator and to an advocate. Usually, advocates became involved with victims and their families when a tracking form was received or after indictment, whichever came first.

PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

- The project planners intended referrals to flow from DHS protective service units to the project advocate in the district attorney's office. In actuality, referrals occurred quite differently. At first, the advocate received no reports of child abuse cases through the district attorney's office or DHS. All referrals were walk-ins, telephone inquiries, or from area police departments. The advocate found herself bringing the walk-ins and callers to the attention of DHS--just the opposite of the originally intended flow. This reversal alerted the project staff to the need for educating the general public and other agencies about the project's purposes and procedures. Community education was started, and this problem no longer exists.

- The district attorney's existing case tracking system was unsuitable for the project advocate's purposes. The system gave no indication about whether an assault case involved a child victim; thus it offered the advocate no help in identifying cases she should follow. The system has been modified to include this much-needed information.

- No system existed to formally transfer information between DHS and the district attorney's office. Referral forms were developed to set up a uniform method to transfer case information between the two agencies.

- Prior to formation of the new Family Violence Unit, prosecutors were slow to use the project advocate on child abuse cases. Therefore, the advocate did not always know when a case was accepted into the criminal justice system. However, with the unit in place the

district attorney's staff and the attorneys in the Family Violence Unit used the child abuse advocate appropriately.

- At the beginning of the project, the role of the project advocate was not clearly understood by other members of the district attorney's staff. As the project advocate and her supervisor communicated with law enforcement personnel, school administrators, attorneys, DHS child protective services specialists, and other community groups and individuals, the advocate's role became clearer.

- The advocate spent much of her time tracking and updating case status. During the next project year, the project staff will explore ways to hire an intern to track cases and update status.

SUMMARY

The Family Violence Unit in the Bexar County District Attorney's Office is made up of six advocates (three spouse abuse and three child abuse, one of whom also handles elderly abuse); three investigators; one supervisor of advocates; six attorneys, including the chief of the Family Violence Unit; four support staff; the DHS legal unit; a training director; two paralegals; and a misdemeanor attorney.

Throughout the project year, the project advocate presented information about the project, child abuse laws, and the Family Violence Unit to Bexar County citizens. She also spent time at major local counseling facilities for children who had been abused.

In addition to informing the county's citizens about the project, a great deal of effort was expended toward setting up the unit and the systems needed to make the advocate position a useful one.

After several months of communication and coordination, the project advocate is beginning to receive appropriate referrals from district attorney prosecutors, law enforcement,

DHS, and other area agencies. Also, the advocate has made an increasing number of speaking engagements, particularly with Bexar County educators, during which she describes the judicial process.

The project received continuation funding from DHS and will operate through August 1987.

Date Sent:_____

APPENDIX A DHS/DA's TRACKING FORM

Tracking Form X-reference_____

1.) Casename:_____DOB_____
2.) Name of Victim:_____DOB_____
   Address_____Phone_____
   In DHS Custody Yes_____NO_____

3.) Alleged Perpetrator:_____DOB_____
   Address_____Phone_____

4.) Police Dept:_____Detective Assigned:_____
5.) Date Offense Report filed:_____
6.) Offense Report # _____
7.) Videotape #_____Written Statment taken: Yes_____NO _____
   Photographs taken: Yes_____No ___ _____
8.) Name of Interviewer_____
9.) Name of CPS Investigator_____
10.) Name of On-Going Worker_____
11.) Other interested individuals_____
    Alternate address_____phone #_____
12.) Type of Alleged Abuse_____
13.) Advocate Assistance Requested:
    Court Advocacy_____ ASAP_____ P.O._____ Tracking only_____
14.) Comments:_____

ADVOCATES RESPONSE

DISPOSITION:

Law Enforcement _____

CASE STATUS:

Case refused, reason_____

Case Not Filed_____PD_____

Waiver of prosecution _____

DA STATUS:

Name of Prosecutor_____
Name of Investigator_____
Name of Advocate _____
Hearing Date:_____Disposition_____
Date of Indictment: _____

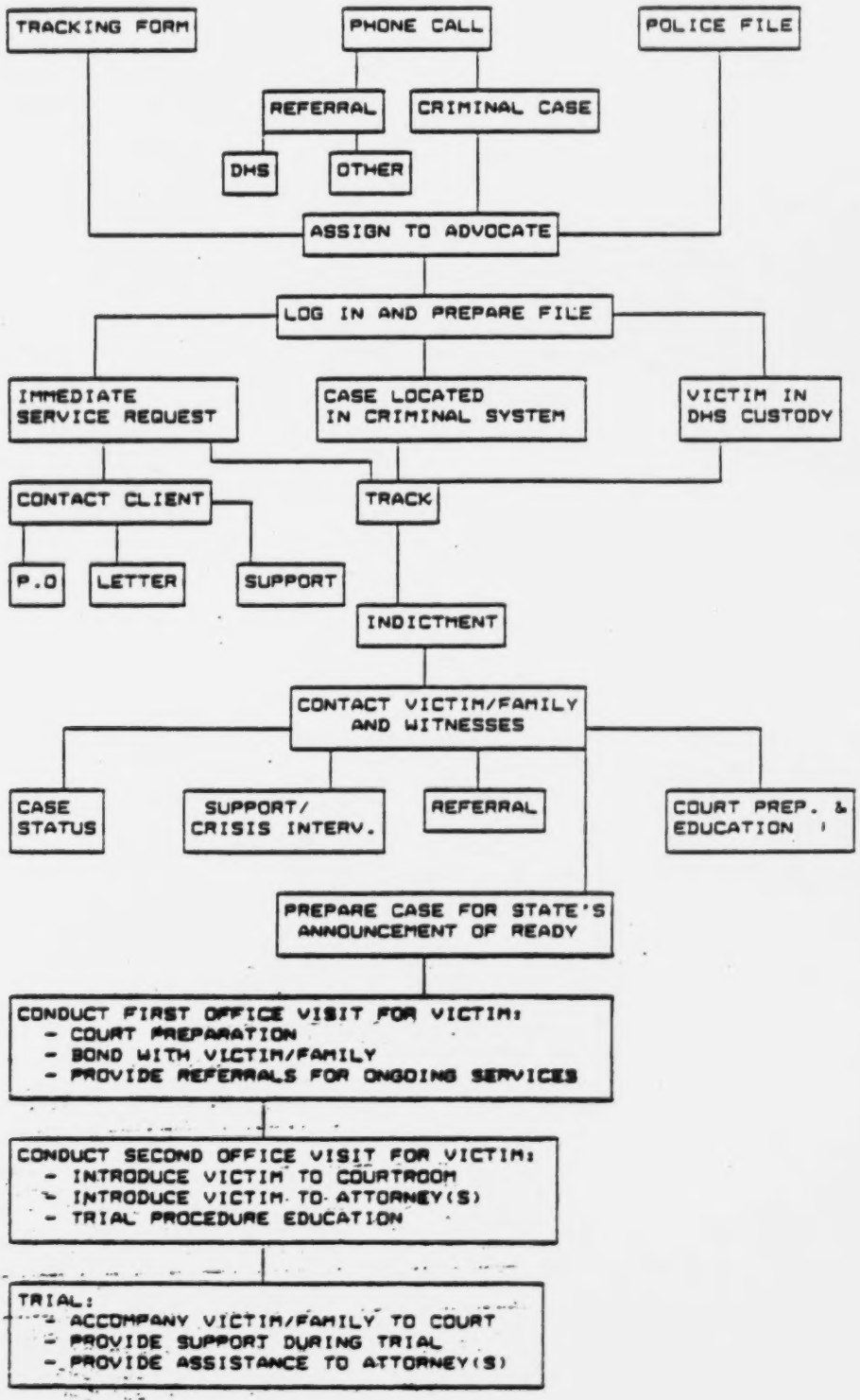
_____ Billed
_____ No Billed
_____ No contact order filed
_____ Protective Order filed
_____ A.P. in home w/victim
_____ Waiver of prosecution signed
_____ A.P. incarcerated
_____ guilty plea entered
_____ conviction_____
_____ outcome _____
_____

Date form sent_____ 20

APPENDIX B

Flowchart Showing
Referral Procedures

INFORMATION PROCESSING WITHIN THE FAMILY VIOLENCE UNIT



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